

WORDS CAN HEAL OR HURT

For the Jewish world into which Jesus was born, words were very powerful. A word spoken in Hebrew was more than just an uttered sound. It was alive with meaning. The Hebrews spoke sparingly. The Hebrew language has fewer than 10,000 words, whereas Greek has 200,000. The English language has some 800,000 words and is growing rapidly. What is the care and intent we give as we use this vast treasure trove of words?

The Old Testament is filled with examples of the power of words. In the creation story in the Book of Genesis, each stage of creation begins with..."And God said..". God spoke the world into being. In Genesis 27 there is the story of Isaac being deceived into giving his blessing to Jacob when he had intended to give it to Esau, the elder son. But once the word of blessing had been spoken, it could not be retracted, It is clear that the Old Testament Jew viewed the words with awe.

Our words both reflect and create our attitudes. The world of medical science is discovering the power of words and attitudes to heal or hurt. Most doctors see at least one person each day who has talked himself or herself into being sick, and will not get well until they change their words and their attitudes. The will to live is a powerful force that can keep a person alive beyond normal expectations, and the will not to live is equally powerful.

In his book, "The Healing Heart", Norman Cousins wrote, "The will to live is not just a frame of mind, but a specific biochemical force. For all we know, the will to live may be one of the connecting links between the belief system and the healing system". Your attitude can make you sick. Your words can kill you, or they can heal you.

There are people whose words wound others, not because they consciously intend them to wound, but because they are careless with words, and/or thoughtless about others. They are so self-centered (narcissistic) that they never consider what their words will do to someone else. The variations of this category of person are almost endless, but more often than not these self-centered people are persons who, for some reason, also consider it their duty to offer unsolicited advice.

Is it really necessary for us to tell people how wrong they are and how they can improve? Most unsolicited judgments and criticisms are given out of a personal need to control and dominate rather than being offered as a humble concern for others. Unless a person asks your opinion, the critique you give will be more an anchor than a sail. And if a person does ask your opinion, be sure your words are carefully selected and offered with the intent to help another up with a tender hand and soft eyes.

When Ben Franklin was not quite 21 years of age, he was dissatisfied with his life. He resolved to change and wrote out four resolutions by which he expected to live the rest of his life. One of those resolutions was: "I will speak ill of no person whatever, not even in a matter of truth". Little wonder he made such a tremendous contribution to the life of this country! Words have the power to help or hurt.

Be careful what you say, to yourself or others.